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# CHURCH REFORM.

## No. 2.

# NO MORE SOLE PATRONS. AND SOUL AUCTIONS.

"Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business."—*ACTS vi. 3.*

BY

LAY CHURCH,  
AUTHOR OF "NO MORE LORD BISHOPS."

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## NO MORE **SOLE** PATRONS AND **SOUL** AUCTIONS.

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THE spirit of reform has at last breathed upon the dry bones of the Established Church of England. Signs of life are apparent here and there in that dreary valley which has so long been comparatively silent and infertile, and ere long we shall see a mighty army in movement on the ground which beforetime was covered chiefly by skeletons.

But whither will that army march, is a question anxiously asked by many. Will one strong column march direct to Rome and remain there; and another equally strong column go to the Free Churches and disband there? Will it endeavour to perfect its system and move in firm English array, against Romanism on the one side and Infidelity on the other? or will it spend its awakened energies in a general internecine war; and destroy those boundaries and defences, and break up that organization which have hitherto limited and characterised it?

The present is a practical age, and eminently fatal to illusions. Venerable questions, which used from time to time to be handed out of their cells with befitting gravity, ventilated with decorous

and sonorous eloquence (or loquacity), and again consigned to repose ; are now grasped and violently shaken ; till their essence, reduced to its smallest expression, is extracted, and then either approved or thrown away. Ancient landmarks no longer command respect but rather invite attack ; utility, that crucial test, is applied with more or less irreverence to all things ; nebulous myths are resolved into defined bodies, and respectable, time-honoured institutions suddenly collapse and disappear in a very marvellous manner.

In the sister kingdom of Ireland we have lately seen that great and imposing Church fortress, the Irish Establishment, fall prostrate in a single session ; like the walls of Jericho before the rams' horn trumpets of Joshua ; and who can say that those trumpets will not again, and soon, be sounded against other and similar walls and battlements ?

The antiquity of the Established Church of England is doubtless in many respects a source of strength to it. It has so long occupied the ground, and by means of its parochial system, its connection with the land, and its social influence, is so mixed up with the habits of the people, and the laws and customs and constitution of the kingdom ; as to have acquired a dead weight of position, which of itself is a great power. The mere cohesion of matter causes solidity in proportion to the weight of the matter. But antiquity brings weakness as well as strength. Age causes decay, rust disfigures and corrodes the brightest metal, lichens

which stifle while they adorn, and parasites which weigh upon and dry up that which they seem to support and beautify ; these are some of the cankers of time which years bring on, in pursuance of that law of change and destruction of outward forms, which is imprinted on all things around us.

And no one will assert that the Established Church of England has any dispensation from this universal law. Yet withal, few Churchmen, whether high or low, broad or narrow, will deny that it has the germs within it of vast benefits to the people of this country ; that, as a system for religionising the people, it is well calculated, *in theory*, to effect that object. But, alas ! the distance which separates theory from practice is so vast as to seem impassable, and it becomes easier to alter the system rather than attempt to restore the Utopia of holy but transcendental dreamers.

And let it be remembered that we are not living under a Theocracy—for the English Church *Establishment* is not of any special Divine appointment. It was commenced and has been gradually built up by fallible—in some cases *very* fallible—men, in obedience to human wants, and often from worldly and selfish motives ; and it can be altered and remodelled by the same power that formed it. Let no one therefore hesitate to lay a reforming hand on Church abuses ; but let him rather go to the work with a good courage, and endeavour if pos-

sible to make the machinery of the Church equal to its high object and mission.

I, for one, should greatly deplore the downfall of the Establishment in England, but I had rather that it should be suddenly overthrown, than die out from atrophy; for in that lingering death would expire painfully, many Christian graces and virtues. Yet I would hope that both such terminations may be avoided. By well-considered, but real and searching reforms, by resolutely cutting away all excrescences and useless parts, and by utilizing every portion of the system; we may, I trust, still see the Anglican Church enjoying a green old age, and combining the vigour of youth with the more sedate strength of manhood.

But the reforms must be *real*. The reign of shams and simulacrum is past; and institutions which have a good object and fall short of it, must be brought up to the proper level, or their end is nigh.

The practical utility of an institution depends on its administration. Now, it may be fairly laid down, that the chief administrative point of the Church of England—that portion of it I mean by which it acts upon the people of the country—is comprised in the class which we call its beneficed clergy, *i. e.* its rectors, vicars and incumbents; and the question is, how far the appointment of this administrative part of the Church is consistent with right principles, and calculated to religionize the people,

and advance the Church in the affections of the nation ?

I will not disturb the dust which lies thick on venerable tomes like Bracton and Fleta, or even Blackstone and Burn ; in order to prove how ecclesiastical benefices first arose. I do not care a *centime* whether the first creator of a benefice—the Proto-Patron—was a bishop, an abbot, a baron, a robber, or a myth. All this is of as small importance as the question whether the primæval incumbents had Roman noses or snubs ; or wore aprons, or trowsers, or neither. Perhaps as a matter of curiosity, I might wish to inspect one of them, and contrast him with his trim well turned-out gentlemanly successor of the present day ; and see where lay the essential difference between the rough material and the manufactured article ; but beyond this I am wholly incurious.

I fancy that the burly, jovial, and generally unlettered priests, of the middle ages, were diligently occupied in doing as little as possible in the way of their spiritual calling. They doubtless looked sharply after their tithes and their dues ; and took good care that the tenth pig, or fowl, or cock of hay, or sheaf of corn, was fat, well liking, and of good odour ; and they soundly rated, and ever and anon with the arm of flesh belaboured, those hinds or churls who tried to shirk Mother Church's claims, or ventured to haggle about free will offerings. I dare say also that they went through their

round of formal religious services with the instinctive regularity of the horse that turns the mill; but as for the spiritual part, I doubt if the generality of the incumbents had any distinct idea what spirituality meant.

I also fancy that the people were chiefly regarded by their priests as we regard sheep and oxen, *i. e.* as producers of certain profits and pleasures, often of an edible and gustatory kind; and that the annual or semi-annual sheep-shearing and fleecing, was a chuckling jolly time for the shepherds, and was held to be the chief object of the flock's presence in the world. To the people existing under such conditions life must have been a queer sort of puzzle—to the priests it was both simple and clear.

For in truth, and as History will tell us if we appeal to it, that great Boa constrictor, the Church of the middle ages, had managed to swallow almost all the land of the kingdom, in addition to its power and influence. Of the whole land in England in the 12th and 13th centuries two-thirds belonged to the Church; and they coveted the remainder. The sum of money then sent out of England to the Pope was three times as much as the revenue of the King. Spirituality was, therefore, for the most part unintelligible and a farce, or was perhaps classed with mysticism and the black art. Something solid and material was the quest of the Church of the period, and instead of the pastor feeding the flock, the flock was the food of the pastor.

But all this is of little importance to us now. The important question, and the one I wish to discuss, is the actual existing mode of appointing to benefices in the English Church; and its effect on that Church, its ministers, and its people; and I intend to show first, that that mode is bad, and next to suggest a thorough change, and, I believe, a great improvement in it.

The right of appointment to benefices in the Church of England, in other words the Patronage of the Church, belongs to individuals. In some cases these individuals are lay, in others clerical. The Crown and Lord Chancellor appoint to say about 900 benefices. The Bishops and Chapters appoint to about 2700, Corporations, ecclesiastical (especially the Universities, which possess a vast number) and lay, appoint to about 900. And private Patrons, who are the largest holders of benefices as they possess two-thirds of the whole number, appoint to the remainder; making in all, a total of nearly 13,000 benefices in England and Wales.

In all these benefices the Incumbent has the legal monopoly of the religious Church teaching in the parish or district. None but he can legally preach and teach Church doctrines therein. And this, whether he himself teaches and preaches those doctrines or not. He has a complete and legal monopoly; and can, and not unfrequently does, act as the occupant of a kind of "manger," which has but little relation to that of Bethlehem. In

fact it would sometimes seem as if he were placed in the parish, not to bring religion into it, but rather *to keep it out.*

Now the Lay Patrons, who possess two-thirds of the whole number of livings, may be, and sometimes are Jews, Heathens (naturalized), Infidels, or Atheists ; and if so, their clerical appointments are not likely to be very good. Their reverend appointees *may* be up to the standard, but one would not, *a priori*, expect it. This surely is a strange pass for the Christian Scriptural Church of England to have arrived at ; that those to whom by law belongs the right of nominating fit men to exercise the high office of authorised preachers and administrators of God's Holy Word and sacraments in a parish, may be, and sometimes are, "Jews, Turks, Infidels, and Heretics ;" on whom in one of our collects we specially implore God to have mercy ? Yet, so it is. Then the distribution of benefices is, to say the least, extremely unsatisfactory. They are frequently given from far other motives than Christian and religious ones, and whether the appointee is really suitable and proper for the office. For instance, politics materially influence the choice of the Chancellor. Bishop's livings are often given in a way to cause the remark that the Bishop must do it blindfold. Corporations, having no conscience, are not bound to act on any principle of duty, and therefore ignore the parish and its wants altogether. Private Lay Patrons are generally considered to take more

pains to appoint really fit men ; and yet there are so many exceptions even here, that it is hard to say on which side the rule lies. So that on the whole, numbers of unfit men are appointed to the “cure of souls.” This is the *first*, and it must be admitted the *very bad* effect, of the present law.

A *second* bad consequence is, that the right of Patronage having become vested in an individual, and all rights being maintained and protected by Law, that right has become “property;” and can, therefore, be sold for money, like all other property. It matters not that this saleable, money value right, was in the first instance a high duty, and even privilege, and that it degenerated by abuse into its present shape. Of sentimental trifles, such as conscience and morality, and so forth, the Law takes no official cognizance, “*de minimis non curat Lex;*” but in all its majesty, and with due accompaniment of wig and ermine, solemnly consecrates and maintains wrongs and trespasses as soon as they have gained a good footing in life, and calls them “Property.” True, that in this matter of the sale of “cure of souls,” it has had some slight moral qualms, and has exercised its ingenuity in splitting some unusually fine microscopic hairs. It has decided for instance, that it is illegal and highly improper to sell a “cure” when the Incumbent is “*in extremis,*” i.e. *very ill indeed*; but that if he is only *very poorly*, the disease having been stopped, within, let us suppose, the breadth of a straw,

from extremity, owing say to the effect of a dose; that then it is good and right to do so; and in that case, as Shakespeare says, "The Law permits it, and the Judge awards it." Law being generally inscrutable, one need not try to explain its reasons; but a mere man may be excused for saying that the point of the above distinction is too fine to be visible to the naked eye; and that, if it is wrong to sell a "cure" when the Incumbent is very ill, it is if anything worse to do so when he is very well; that, in fact, morality ought not thus to be made dependent on medicine.

A *third* bad consequence of the present law of Patronage is the outrage on religion and morality caused by the traffic in Livings. It is most astonishing that Christian men should so long have tolerated this crying abuse; it shows a terrible deadness to what is right and good, that this great cancer in the Church should have been allowed to exist and spread as it has done; it is indeed a striking proof how Mammon rules religion, when the cure of Souls is sold by auction for hard cash.

The traffic in the "cure of souls" bears a strong resemblance to the traffic in Indulgences, which so stirred the soul of Luther. In each case spiritualities are sold for money, and in each case appeal is made to low, hard, and worldly motives. For instance, we may see advowsons described in advertisements as "in a good hunting country"—which is a sure find for some ordained Nimrod;

or, there is “good shooting in the neighbourhood,” which is put in to bag a Rev. gunner; or, “a celebrated salmon and trout stream runs through the Parish,” which is a taking bait for the clerical disciple of old Isaak. I know that some of the Apostles were fishermen; but I note first, that it was their calling, and I note secondly, that *they abandoned that calling* to follow their Divine Master. Fishing *per se*, (or *in se*) is harmless—often *very* harmless—but it is not harmless for priests who give much time to it, and are more solicitous for salmon than for souls. Or, “there is much good society in the vicinity,” which smacks of dining out, and balls and dancing; or, “it is a very sociable place,” which points toward comfortable teas and muffins, or even rubbers and hot suppers. In one case which appeared a few months back, “a purchaser, about 70, would be preferred;” and this was because it was a family Living, with a youthful rector in embryo, as yet callow and unfledged, but whose pen feathers were fast growing; and whose guardians therefore wanted the Living to be purchased by one who would not live an unpleasantly long time; and who would keep the nest warm till it was wanted by the younger bird. And to accommodate this state of things, and with that utter ignoring of the feelings and state of the flock, which is naïve and affecting—and it really does affect me very strongly indeed!—the Parish was first to be handed over to a Pastor too old for

work, and then to one too young for it! In another case, the inducement held out was that the Parish had a population "according to the last census, (for they are most scrupulous in these matters of 'mint, annis, and cummin') of only 150 persons;" and in another case, had "only 100 persons;" but this last instance is very rare, and must have been, as the auctioneer would say, "a really sweet thing;" for a Clergyman might thereby have the advantage of leading an almost wholly idle life as to sacred matters, and having nearly all his time free for the world and its pleasures.

I do not assert, or wish to imply, that *all* Livings are dealt in from such and similar motives. Doubtless some are bought with a direct view to the glory of God, to do His work, and promote His cause in the world; but I believe that such form a very small portion of the total.

But when do we see appeals made to those high and holy feelings which should be inspired by a high and holy calling? Where do we find mention made—by way of inducement—of Parishes with 10,000 souls sunk in vice, ignorance, and want, and "perishing for lack of knowledge;" of others which are crying out for schools and benevolent institutions; of others—perhaps in the "black country,"—a very desert of barbarism—but which an earnest Minister might make blossom as the rose, and bear good fruit for eternity? Why! there are parochial districts in Christian and civi-

lized England, which contain as many English heathen as inhabit the most swarming island in Polynesia ; and which would regard with affectionate reverence, and for ever ennable, the name of the man who would earnestly labour among them, and become their Apostle ; as the natives of Rarotonga and Tahiti keep warm in their minds and in their love, the memories of Williams and Bicknell and Henry.

And these should be the prizes of a *Christian* Church, these should be the "good things" sought for by Ministers of the Gospel ; and thus *would* it be, if the Church of England were animated with a real sense of its mission. Yet where do we see advertisements of *them*? Alas ! nowhere. Everywhere is the appeal made to the merest and most *material* of worldly feelings. Mammon will have pleasure or profit in return for his cash, and all else is but loss and disadvantage.

And this is the state of things which has been winked at, and permitted to grow up in our midst ! Is it not a shame and a cutting reproach to us as Churchmen ? Can any one hesitate as to the propriety, nay, the urgent *necessity* of abolishing it, at almost any cost ? If there were no other reason for reforming the present law of Patronage than this single one, surely it ought of itself to unite in one loud and indignant voice, the suffrages of all Christian people.

And how is it that the Fathers of the Church,

and its special legislators—the *Lord* Bishops—have allowed these shocking abuses to go on year after year, and have never proposed any effective legislation to amend them? Judging by Hansard, their practice seems to have been that which is called by *silly* people, “safe,” (but which has been more dangerous and prolific of revolutions than any other,) of opposing everything, and proposing nothing. And yet, had a few only among them set themselves to the work, they would have cleared the Church of this particular reproach long since. It is true that within the last few months, and now that Public Opinion is becoming alive to the subject, two or three occupants of the Episcopal Bench have ventured to hint delicately at amendments in the law of Patronage, &c.; yet they deserve but scant thanks for their tardy conversion. It is probably due to the conviction everywhere prevalent, that ere long, a sweeping reform will be made in the English Church; and they think to take the wind out of its sails by initiating some half-and-half measure themselves, which shall have much “sound and fury, and shall yet signify nothing.” But the move comes too late, if that be its object; for who will, in these days, believe that any *effectual* Church reform can come from Church dignitaries, unless they be made of very different materials from those in use during the last century or two?

A fourth bad consequence of the present law of

Patronage is, that when there is a living "in the family," it is naturally kept for a member of that family; and often determines the entry into the ministry of a youth who is very unfit for its sacred obligations. '*Poeta nascitur non fit.*' You may make an average lawyer, or a soldier, or a doctor, or a merchant, but you cannot make a proper parson. If he is not really "inwardly moved and called by the Holy Ghost," (which he is made solemnly to declare at his ordination *that he is,*) better far for him, and still better for his parishioners, that he abstain from taking Holy Orders. To say nothing of the many young men who are clearly unfit for the sacred office; how many are there who would have made excellent members of lay professions, but who as clergymen only add to that large body of *negatives* who weigh down the Church of England by their unfitness; and some of whom are themselves weighed down by a sense of the heavy responsibility which lies upon them; and which they feel unable either to justify or to throw aside. Heavily, indeed, do these men lie at the door of the present system of patronage, and loudly will they one day condemn it. I do not mean to assert that no improvement has taken place during the last few years; or that we are now shocked by the many cases of clerical misconduct which disgraced the Church of England during the last century; but I do assert, that numbers of young men are ordained into the Church under the present Patronage system, who never should be admitted

there at all. It is all very well to say that the Bishops guard the portals of the Church, that they narrowly scrutinize testimonials, and test carefully the call and fitness of the candidates, and so forth ; but "*nolo episcopari*,"—I decline being Bishopped. From all time Bishops have been courtiers, and worshippers of the rising sun ; and one may be permitted to doubt whether their virtue is so rigid as to make them shut the door in the face of a youth a few degrees below the standard ; but whose claims are supported by a powerful parent, highly born, and perchance noble or "*honourable*."

A *fifth* bad consequence of the existing law is, that the parish, that is the people, who in theory constitute the flock of the new pastor, being in no way consulted or looked to, and having no voice or influence in the matter, take but a slight interest in it. They regret or not the old Incumbent, according to his merits or demerits; and they naturally hope to have a good one in his place ; but the one goes out and the other comes in in a mechanical, regulated, sort of way ; and they look upon the operation with a kind of torpid curiosity, as upon a matter which they can neither help on or off. Low churchmen may desire an evangelical, high churchmen a ritualist, philosophers a broad churchman ; mothers, with unmarried daughters very eligible for a parsonage, may sigh for a bachelor ; and steady-going sociabilities wish for a married man who is "*clubbable*" and plays whist ; but

their feelings and wants, their hopes and fears, are all equally fruitless. The clerical head is introduced to the parochial hat; and whether it fits or not, the two must thenceforth rub on together.

Such are some only of the bad consequences which flow from the present law of Church Patronage. They have long shocked the feelings of thoughtful men of all shades of opinion, yet no effort has been made to remove them. But that spirit of progress which has for some years been actively employed in rooting out civil abuses has at length penetrated the sanctuary of the Church. And that great measure, the disestablishment of the Irish Church, which a wise and powerful Premier carried through Parliament during the last session, has imparted such an impetus to Church reform generally, as gives hope that the Church of England may even yet be freed from her many weights and hindrances, and become worthy to be the National church of a great free, and Protestant state. The passing, *in a single session*, of the Irish bill, in the teeth of the strongest opposition which the Heads of the clergy could raise, ought to show them that their real power and influence with the nation is but small; that when the deep feeling of the people is stirred, they are impotent to resist it; for never, I should think, since the Crusades, was the "drum ecclesiastic" beaten so vigorously. In pulpit and on platform, publicly and privately, "in season and out of

"season," did the leaders of the clergy do their utmost to defeat the bill ; and the result of all their efforts was—*a total and ignominious defeat*. This surely ought to teach those amongst them who will learn, that henceforth they must follow the national will, and give up the idea of leading it. The latter position they have lost for ever ; and the "drum" may be sent to Rome.

Yet doubtless they have learnt something ; for upon the questions of Church reform which are now on all sides mooted and discussed, the clergy enter the field with a freedom which is refreshing to witness, though a few years ago it would have been deemed almost licentious ; and this very matter of Church Patronage is, by common consent, placed in the front rank of such questions.

The daily journals, from the *Times* and *Daily News* and even the *Standard* downwards, to *Punch* and *Fun* upwards, Church congresses and conferences, Bishops in their charges, Senators in their speeches, pamphlets by the dozen, and leading articles by the score—all take up the subject and suggest amendments in the law of Patronage, and chiefly in the direction of giving more power to the laity.

And only a few weeks back a noble Duke—of St. Albans—and all honour be to him for his boldness and strange foresight; for be it said with humility that Dukes generally do not exhibit that gift; voluntarily requested the parishioners of Red-

bourne to choose their church minister for themselves, adding "that he felt that if the laity "generally had more voice in the selection of their "ministers it would immensely strengthen the "hands and materially increase the usefulness of the "clergy of the Church of England." Perhaps there may be some who will listen to a Duke, whilst they shut their ears against plain "Laychurch;" and to them I commend the perusal of the Duke's most excellent letter, which entitles him to the sincere respect of all Church reformers.

The matter is thus well before the public.

And when a matter of general interest is before the public, it is fitting for those citizens who have ideas bearing upon it which they think sound, to contribute them to the common stock. If the ideas are worthless the wind will soon blow them away, if they have truth in them they will reach the ground and take root; and so good will arise to the State. For myself, I have discussed the subject with men of various opinions, and the result I will presently venture, with all due submission, to particularise. Those who have reflected on the matter believe the mode proposed to be simple and adapted for practical use, and that it supplies a real want. It is based on foundations which will increase the stability of the Established Church of England, and give it an increased probability of permanence; a result which we earnestly desire.

The great principle of the plan is, the *appointment of Ministers* by Patron, Bishop, Parishioners, and Communicants, *jointly*. It does not merely give a Veto, or power of objection, to the laity, but a *real positive voice* in the appointment. A mere Veto seems to me not worth much. It is at most a negative power, and in many cases would not be exercised at all, owing to the timidity of people and their dislike to come forward. Besides which, a Veto could only be exercised on certain specified grounds of objection, and a man might be very objectionable as a minister, and yet never come within those specified grounds. Indeed, it is not difficult to suppose an individual against whom no tangible *legal* objection could be sustained, and who would yet be a very unfit man to have the care of a parish. A Veto would only be used against the decidedly bad men; while the large class of men of a negative sort, those who for active religious utility are not worth their salt,—cats who catch no mice—would still infest and paralyze the church as they now do. Therefore anything like a mere Veto, or extension of the “*si quis*” power, as it is technically called, is, in my humble opinion, not worth fighting for.

What I wish for is a real substantive *power and voice* in a portion of the Laity, jointly with the Patron and Bishop, to appoint their Church minister; and this principle should be embodied in an Act of Parliament. For the matter is within the

competence of *Parliament*, and not of *Convocation*. The thing sought is an alteration of the *Law* of Patronage, and Parliament is the only power by which a *Law* can be altered or repealed. The matter would, therefore, be out of the domain of Convocation, which, fortunately for the kingdom, has no independent legislative power; and would be discussed and settled by practical men, and not be merely talked and squabbled about.

Let the power of appointing Incumbents be divided between the Patron, the Bishop, and the Laity; in the following proportions, viz.—

1. The Patron should have <i>two</i> votes . . . .	2
2. The Bishop of the diocese should have <i>one</i> vote	1
3. The Churchwardens, as representing the parish and the incumbent, should have each one vote	2
4. The Communicants, as the essence of the con- gregation, should be represented by two dele- gates, chosen in manner after-mentioned . . .	2
	<hr/>
	Votes in all
	7

The Patron should nominate his candidate in the first instance, and would thus have priority; and if there were a majority of votes in his candidate's favour he should be elected. If, however, the majority were against him, then the Communicants' delegates and the *people's* church-warden jointly should present *their* candidate, who should be elected if he had a majority of votes in his favour; and if he failed to secure this, then the two candidates, together with one to be then

nominated by the Bishop if he thought proper, should be put in nomination together ; and he who had the greatest number of votes in his favour should be inducted to the benefice.

If the Bishop were also the Patron of the living he would have three votes. In all Bishops' livings therefore, the clergy would be represented by four votes out of seven ; *i. e.* the Bishop's three votes and the Incumbent's churchwarden's one. In other livings the Laity would be represented by four votes out of seven, *i. e.* the Patron, the people's churchwarden, and the two delegates of the communicants. The power would therefore be fairly and equally divided according to the circumstances.

It will be observed that stress has been laid on the word "communicants" instead of "parish" or "congregation," and that the delegates are made to represent the communicants only. And why ? Because a "Parish" is composed of various elements, such as Nonconformists and Romanists ; who have no more right to join in nominating our minister than we should have in nominating theirs ; and a still larger body of irreligious or anti-religious people, whose voice in the matter would be a profanity. And as to the word "congregation," in it also are to be found, alas ! too many who are only nominally churchmen ; and who bear no mark whereby they may be qualified for shareing in such an important religious duty as choosing a minister. The communicants are the heart and essence of a con-

gregation — *they* constitute the Church, properly speaking—and to them alone should be confided this important duty. Still, the Parish generally would, by *its own* proper churchwarden, have one vote in the matter.

And in order to secure those who are in some degree *habitual* communicants; no one should be allowed to act as a delegate, or to vote in choice of a delegate, who had not received the communion at least twice during the twelve months preceding the election of delegates. These communicant's delegates should be elected annually at the same period as the churchwardens are elected; and a register should be kept by the officiating minister of the names of persons communicating; which register should be the proof of their right to vote for such delegates. No communicant, however, who was not a parishioner should have a vote on the matter, it being essentially a parochial one.

In parishes with a population below 500, and where it would therefore be difficult to find persons suitable for the office, one communicant's delegate should suffice instead of two; and in parishes with a population below 200 there should be no such delegate, but the Patron, the Bishop, and the churchwardens should alone nominate.

Such, therefore, would be the *new plan* for appointing to benefices.

Its *FIRST* advantage would be to ensure better men as ministers. I do not merely mean, more *talented* men. Talent is excellent in its way ; but it is not the whole, nor half the whole in this matter. I had oftentimes rather see an ounce of zeal in the minister, than a pound of talent. What is wanted in the average Church minister is more earnestness, more devotion to his calling. There are many cases where a zealous *passman* would leave a senior wrangler out of sight, in the conversion of souls. No one, however, will deny, that the Church of England possesses a noble army of devoted earnest learned Christian ministers, of whom any Church might be proud ; but their presence there is often due to accidental causes.

There can hardly be the same chance of a good appointment with only one average patron, influenced by various motives ; as with a body of seven, of different classes, and chosen in the manner indicated. With the larger number of electors, there would be a greater number, and therefore a greater choice, of candidates ; and as there would always be some opposition, this would ensure a more careful scrutiny into the qualifications of each candidate. And this would naturally tend to bring *the best men to the front*, and would gradually discourage and clear off that dead weight of incapable mediocrities, equally good—*i. e. equally bad*—for the Church as for anything else ; who at present fill so many of our pulpits, and *by the same opera-*

*tion empty* so many of our churches. We should then, too, cease being vexed with that nepotism which prevails in some dioceses ; and with that preference of youths, well recommended by themselves or by their friends, over men who have grown grey in *step-mother Church's* service; because they have had too much modesty to recommend themselves, and too much self-respect to importune others to recommend them ; and who therefore have spent their lives in the chill shade of genteel poverty, devoured by its cares, and worn down by its trials.

Men *fit* for their profession would then be chosen —men, who among other qualifications, could *read* and *preach*. It is a marvellous thing that in the appointment of readers and preachers—reading and preaching are almost the only things that are *not* inquired into and tested ! We should then have the pleasure of hearing our fine Liturgy well and *impressively* read ; and not mumbled or gabbled as we now and then do ; and of listening to sermons containing something more earnest and convincing than the learned, or quaint, or elegant, platitudes, which remind one of school boy themes ; and would not ruffle the sleek coat of a conscientious church mouse, much less pierce the thick hard skin of human nature. Instead of written essays, which reduce us to a state of coma by their dullness, or delude us with a dish of dry dogma ; we should be stirred by preachers with all their hearts in the cause, who are filled with a conviction of its importance, and

who burn with its fire. Oh ! when shall we listen to more of such men in our English churches ! Would to heaven that we could do so *now* !

Yet let no man decry mediocrities. Society could not exist without them. They are always respectable and generally amiable. They form the padding and stuffing by which the figure of society is "made up," and it would be crooked and offensive without them. But let them go elsewhere, than into Holy Orders, unless they feel a *special* call for them. Elsewhere they might do well and be happy. At least they would not be cramped, or soured, by the bonds of a profession unsuitable to them ; and would escape that remorse for holy vows broken and high duties unfulfilled, which must, one would think, haunt those who are culpable therein.

And, let it be remembered, that you cannot by any legal process, compel an unfit or negligent minister to perform his duty *well*. The law takes no cognizance of such a case. It will (at an enormous expense to the prosecutor) punish a man for flagrant offences, and compel him to do certain express duties which he may have omitted or refused doing ; but it will and can do no more ; and those cases of general apathy and unsuitableness which affect the Church's well doing in the Nation, far more than the other class which only occurs occasionally, are left wholly untouched. Besides this, no law can compel that which is impossible ; *e. g.* make a negligent cold man who puts no heart into

his work, perform that work with earnestness and zeal. That is beyond the province of any Law. To secure that result, you must have good and fitting men appointed in the first instance.

So much therefore for the *first* advantage of the new plan—viz. that it would give us a better class of ministers.

*SECONDLY*, by giving the Laity a voice in the selection of their ministers it would greatly increase their interest in church matters. To any layman who has the interest of the Church at heart, it is depressing and annoying to feel that he and his lay brethren are handed over from one Incumbent to another as if they were bales of dry goods. An estate in Russia is (or was until lately) sold with so many serfs on it, “by the tale;” a living in England is sold with so many “souls” in it, “according to the last census,” upon whom the purchaser has certain legal and exclusive rights.—Which is the worst? the civil bondage or the religious? ‘Tis hard to say. But only give the laity a voice in the selection of their minister, and I firmly believe an activity and an interest in the Church would spring up which would astonish us all. At present the Church system is to many laymen a thing of extraneous growth, a mystery in which they have neither act nor part; they look on its doings as their fathers did; go to its services without thought, listen lazily, and return untouched; and the system rolls on,

and they roll on too, in different orbits, and having no bond of connection save money, sought by one side and withheld or doled out grudgingly by the other. But let the system be changed, and the right of the Laity to choose their own ministers be recognized, and a hearty vigour would soon be apparent in Church matters ; and many a layman, by looking with affectionate regard on the outside of the casket, would be led to an earnest seeking after the precious jewel within it.

*THIRDLY*, the plan proposed would practically put an end to that scandal of the English Church—the open traffic in livings ; upon which I have already made certain strong, and to some perhaps, unpalatable, observations. But I think and hope that there are but few, save that class who would sell their very birthright or their parents, if they could only make money by it, who will not agree with me in saying that the sale of Church livings—of the “cure of souls”—is a foul leprous spot, that tarnishes and eats deeply into the English Church. It is not merely the buying and selling *in* the Temple which Our Saviour viewed with such a righteous anger, but it is the buying and selling of the very Temple itself. And the plan proposed would, in fact, put an end to this practice ; because under it the Patron would only have a portion of the power of appointment, and of course no one would purchase what the seller could not engage *positively* to deliver to him. As

it is, the discussions during the last few years upon the moral right to sell livings have materially affected their money value, and they have become "drugs in the market;" for many, both buyers and sellers, have felt that they were doing a very questionable act.

As to compensating private Patrons (and them only) under such circumstances, Parliament would doubtless deal liberally with that question, as it is our habit to deal in England with all vested interests, however wrongly acquired. We compensated the owners of slaves for their vested interest in the bodies of their black brethren; and I suppose it would be considered necessary to compensate the owners of livings for their vested interest in the souls of their white countrymen. Without this gilding, probably the pill would not be swallowed; but the schedule of the names of the Patrons, and the amounts received by them, would be a very curious and interesting document; which history would, no doubt, duly record for the instruction of posterity.

And the compensation should be confined to the case of such advowsons as had been actually dealt in for money within the last 40 or 50 years; but even with this limitation I confess, that in my humble opinion, they have, in general, no better moral claim to compensation, than had the owners of those rotten boroughs which were extinguished without compensation by the great Reform Bill in 1832. And in estimating the amount of com-

pensation, it should be remembered that the Patron would still have two votes in seven, which if he were desperately and incurably venal, he might still make money of. But perhaps the best plan would be to abolish the right to sell advowsons, by a distinct prohibitory clause, and so shut the door in Mammon's face ; providing him with a suitable compensation by way of ointment for his sore ; but taking care that the compensation be based on that reduced value of advowsons which the influence of an enlightened public opinion has of late effected.

*FOURTHLY*, the plan proposed would relieve Patrons from that heavy responsibility which at present is cast upon them, of having thus to make, by themselves and without any one to divide the weight with them, a choice in this most important matter. I should think that an alleviation of such a perplexing and oftentimes painful duty would be welcomed by many Patrons with pleasure. At present the law compels them to make a choice ; and the task of deciding finally between family and friendly and personal claims, and the claims of the high office, must often be one of almost overwhelming difficulty.

*FIFTHLY, and lastly.* All parties in the Church would probably be satisfied ; because all would be more likely than they are at present to get a minister in some degree of sympathy with their own religious opinions. As it is, a Patron may, and often does, impose a high ritualist minister on an

evangelical people, and vice versa ; but between the two churchwardens and the two delegates, there would, under the new system, be such a representation of the feelings of *the congregation*, as would probably procure a choice in general accordance therewith ; and surely this would be better, than as we now do, leaving it as much to chance as if it were decided by lot, or the *sortes virgilianæ* ?

These are some of the advantages, which, in the opinion of many persons, would flow from such an alteration in the law as has been sketched, and a little attention and reflection on the part of readers will soon suggest many others.

Let me here repeat, that the principle of the Plan is not that of *popular* election, but of election by a select body, composed of Patron, Bishop, Parish, and Communicants. It is important to bear this well in mind ; as I strongly object to the mere popular election of a minister, which I believe would lead to many evils.

Of course it is easy for any opponent of a 'perfervid' humour and a superfluity of wit, first to misrepresent and then to pick holes. The building up and knocking down of men of straw is a very ancient trade, which is still followed ; and although I propose to have only *seven* electors, yet already I have heard the plan misrepresented as a choice by universal suffrage, male and female, and the vote by ballot. And, although the plan proposed contemplates nothing of the kind, yet

some clever caricaturist will, perhaps, draw a fancy sketch of a crowded hustings, filled by noisy preachers giving simultaneous samples of their powers—Belial on one side and Boanerges on the other—and with placards in the background calling on the electors to “Vote for the Reverend Snooks, with a wife and seven small children,”—or “for the recently ordained and eloquent Jones,” blushing and celibate, but ready for matrimonial conversion at any moment. And I do not deny, men being fallible and liable to err, that a candidate with a prepossessing countenance, the form of the Belvidere Apollo, and fidelity to the Decalogue written on his face, but whose theology is withal a little shaky, and his doctrinal points slightly obscure; will generally have a better chance of success than an undersized, vulgar man, of an oily complexion and rough address, with an ugly curve about the knees, and who squints; and this although the latter may have an accurate knowledge of any number of articles, rubrics, and serious dogmatism in general. Common sense will, however, do justice to these little deviations from the right line; and will remember that to such influences all electors are liable, whether they be seven or seven hundred or one only; for after all they are but men.

Some persons have also objected, that the proposed plan would probably lead to canvassing for votes by the clergy; which they say is an improper and undignified proceeding. But is not this openly

and very freely done under the present system ? as well as in the case of the many clerical offices which are filled by election. Have not clergymen who are “on their Preferment,” generally two or three livings in their mind’s eye, after the Patrons of which they look pretty sharply ? and as to the health and movements of the Incumbents of which, they make occasional but tender enquiries ? Are not the relations and intimate friends of the Patron duly sought for, booked, and applied to, if not for their “vote and interest,” yet for their recommendation to the Patron of the great acquisition the parish would have in their most excellent and valuable friend ? The Patron’s postbag, if it could speak, would at once answer these questions affirmatively, with a dismal recollection of the stuffy feelings experienced at those periods of distention. Let no one therefore say that up to the present time clerical canvassing for livings is a thing unknown and not to be hinted at.

And to these, which are mere trifling objections, others can of course be added, of a really serious and legitimate kind, in the way of fair argument and difference of principle — for what human system is free from objection ? But let those objections be fairly weighed and balanced against the numerous and weighty objections to the plan at present in existence ; and then say on which side the scales incline.

Such are the principles and outlines of a Plan

which has been considered and approved by many persons, both lay and clerical, but especially by laymen, as sound, practical and simple. And let it be remembered that the laity is not merely a portion of the Church, but by far the largest and most influential portion ; though it has only lately began to assert itself. Let it be remembered also that the clergy exist for the laity, and not the laity for the clergy. Hitherto there has not been much real co-operation between them, though it is a stock subject, and is loudly and episcopally talked of. True that we have seen browsing here and there in the Church's precincts, tame laymen with veneration and obedience strongly developed, and chiefly belonging to the "upper ten thousand ;" who have been caught and penned up by clerical patrons, and called "Synodical delegates," "consultees of the Church," and so forth ; who deliver utterances according to their kind, under the supervision of their reverend and very watchful shepherds; but anything like outspoken, free, *middle class* action has, until very lately, been almost unheard of.

Certainly we have Church Congresses ; which must be accepted—for they are facts—*quantum valeant*. Now and then we read excellent addresses and suggestions ; but generally we see ingenious, well-meaning, and often impracticable men who appear in them, charged to the muzzle with curious theories of the most clashing kind ; which are let off, one after another, from opposite points of the com-

pass, until attention grows mazed ; and the discussion which ensues thereupon can hardly be called serious. It is a sort of threshing which produces too much chaff. There seems a lack of reality about the matter ; and such would appear to be the general opinion of middle class laymen, as few or none of that class, and indeed, comparatively few laymen of any class, take a prominent part in them. Five-sixths of the performers are clerics, and yet the whole clergy does not form a five-hundredth part of the English Church ! And I fancy that the holders of small Livings and the Curates—who constitute probably nine-tenths of the clerical body,—and who must know the practical working of the Church far better than its Dignitaries and high men, would not be listened to with much patience there ; at least they seem to think so, as they seldom, if ever, address the meetings. Congresses, therefore, at present are in a somewhat sporadic state.

The times of Church government by Divine right have passed away, and their advocates are found chiefly as fossils. Despotism in religion, and in politics, have left the stage together, arm-in-arm, in their true and natural sympathy ; and in their stead we have a free Constitutional Monarchy, and a Church tending towards freedom. Religious liberty, after long and fierce struggles, is established as the corner-stone of the edifice ; and yet, still, in despite of the Reformation, we submit to this

posthumous despotism of Church Patrons ! Surely it is impossible that such an abuse of power in so sacred a concern, can long remain, to mar that liberty in religious matters, of which Englishmen justly boast.

Let the men of power in the Church of England boldly put their hands to the plough, and all may still be well; *but time presses.* As Archdeacon Sandford well said at a recent meeting in Leeds,

“ He trembled for the future of the National Establishment, if the clergy and members of the English Church did not learn wisdom in time, and if “ they did not see that the real strength and stability of the Establishment was not in the favour “ of Princes and in the patronage of the wealthy “ and the great; but in the affections and esteem “ of the English people.”

The key-stone of the English Church is its administration, and it comes into contact with the people chiefly through its Incumbents. By giving the people a choice in the selection of those Incumbents, you enlist their interest in, and probably secure their support of, the system. And when resting on that broad base, the Church is *really and truly* the National Church, instead of being so in name only. Nothing has tended more directly to alienate the minds of the Laity from the Church, than the harsh and capricious use of patronage ; and so long as it is vested in one individual, it will always be more or less harsh and capricious. This abuse, more than

anything else, has vexed and torn the Established Church in Scotland ; and it operates in the same direction in the Church of England. What the Church needs, as is the cry of every enlightened man on the Bench of Bishops, (and there are now more such than have been seen there for a very long period,) is the active sympathy and genuine co-operation of the Laity ; and nothing is so certain to promote this, as giving them a voice in the selection of their ministers.

And therefore, as an old and sincere Churchman who desires the maintenance of the Church Establishment by the Nation, and feels convinced that only by wise and searching reforms can that maintenance be secured, I *again* say heartily, “ Success to Church reform,” and in particular,

*No more SOLE Patrons and SOUL Auctions.*

20th OCTOBER, 1869.

































